

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 4906

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, ECIN, BG, IN

SUBJ: INDO-BANGLADESH ECONOMIC QUESTIONS

REF: DACCA 3133

1. SUMMARY. INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION FIRST SECRETARY RANEN SEN DESCRIBED TO EMBOFF SEPTEMBER 29 STATUS OF LONG-STANDING INDO-BANGLADESH ECONOMIC ISSUES WITH OVERRRIDING POLITICAL CHARACTER: MARITIME BOUNDARY; FARAKKA BARRAGE; AND ANTI-SMUGGLING EFFORTS. REGARDING ALL THREE, SEN LOOKED FOR FURTHER COOPERATION WITH NEW BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT, AND GRADUAL RESOLUTION WITH SPECIFIC PROGRESS FOLLOWING AN AS YET UNSCHEDULED MINISTERIAL-LEVEL MEETING BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS. END SUMMARY.

2. MARITIME BOUNDARY. SEN SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH IT HAD BEEN DENIED IN THE PRESS, PRIME MINISTER GANDHI HAD RAISED THE OFFSHORE BOUNDARY ISSUE AT THE TIME OF THE COMMONWEALTH PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING IN JAMAICA EARLIER THIS YEAR WITH PRESIDENT MUJIB. (SEE ALSO DACCA 3133) PRIME MINISTER GANDHI HAD URGED ON MUJIB A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. QUOTE LET US NOT LET THIS ISSUE BOG DOWN IN A HOST OF TECHNICAL LEGAL QUESTIONS BUT LET US RESOLVE IT IN A SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP. UNQUOTE (STILL ACCORDING TO SEN). MORE SPECIFICALLY, PRIME MINISTER GANDHI HAD PROPOSED A SOLUTION WHICH WOULD PLACE
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THE BOUNDARY CONSIDERABLY FURTHER TO THE WEST OF THE ORIGINAL

INDIAN LINE, WHILE URGING THE BANGLADEES TO WITHDRAW THEIR EXTREME CLAIM.

3. ALTHOUGH THE INDIAN AND BANGLADESH FOREIGN MINISTERS MET IN NEW YORK IN SEPTEMBER, SEN DID NOT THINK THAT THE MARITIME BOUNDARY ISSUE HAD BEEN DISCUSSED SINCE THE COUP. HE EXPECTED THAT IT WOULD BE TAKEN UP AGAIN AT THE NEXT MINISTERIAL MEETING AS SOON AS THAT COULD BE ARRANGED. HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD STICK TO THE RESPONSE OFFERED MRS. GANDHI BY PRIME MINISTER MUJIB, WHICH WAS TO WELCOME THE INDIAN INITIATIVE, AND THAT A SPECIFIC AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED SHORTLY.

4. COMMENT. IT IS OUR ESTIMATE THAT THE INDIAN COMPROMISE LINE WOULD SLICE OFF ONLY A VERY SMALL PORTION OF THE ASHLAND AREA, BUT WOULD NOT CUT OFF THE SOME 2,000 SQUARE MILES FROM ASHLAND NOR NIBBLE AWAY A SMALL CORNER OF THE CANADIAN SUPERIOR CONTRACT AREA AS THE ORIGINAL INDIAN PROPOSAL WOULD HAVE DONE.

5. FARAKKA BARRAGE. SEN SAID THAT THE APRIL 21- MAY 31, 1975 TRAIL OPERATION OF THE FARAKKA BARRAGE UNDER THE INDO-BANGALEE INTERIM AGREEMENT HAD BEEN QUOTE SUCCESSFUL END QUOTE. JOINT INSPECTION TEAMS HAD STUDIED THE WATER LEVELS, SALINITY, AND OTHER VARIABLES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER. THE EXPERTS' REPORT HAD BEEN WRITTEN AND THE FACTUAL INFORMATION APPROVED BY BOTH GOVERNMENTS. HOWEVER, THE INFERENCES TO BE DRAWN FROM THESE FACTS REMAINED TO BE AGREED UPON. SEN WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE ENTIRE REPORT WOULD BE COMPLETED AND THAT THE TWO GOVERNMENTS, AGAIN AT THE NEXT MINISTERIAL MEETING, WOULD BE ABLE TO REACH AGREEMENT ON A COMPARABLE ARRANGEMENT FOR THE 1976 DRY SEASON. ONE REASON WHY THE INDIANS HAD BEEN INTERESTED IN DEFUSING THE OFFSHORE BOUNDARY ISSUE, SEN SAID, WAS TO PAVE THE WAY FOR DISCUSSIONS AND A WORKING SOLUTION TO THE FARAKKA BARRAGE ISSUE.

6. COMMENT. SEN'S LINKAGE OF FARAKKA AND THE MARITIME BOUNDARY ISSUES IS REFRESHING FOR ITS CANDOR, BUT HARDLY SURPRISING. THE BANGLADEES ARE WELL AWARE THAT THE FARAKKA ISSUE IS OF CENTRAL DOMESTIC POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE GOI IN WEST BENGAL. A CONVERSATION WITH KAISER MURSHED OF MFA IN THE RECENT PAST NEVERTHELESS LEFT AN EMBOFF WITH THE IMPRESSION THAT THE HASSLE OVER CONFIDENTIAL

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CUSECS IS FAR FROM OVER, AND THAT -- JUST AS SEN SUGGESTS -- PERHAPS THE BEST THAT CAN BE HOPED FOR IS ANOTHER "TRAIL PERIOD" NEXT YEAR. DIVERSIONS OF THE KIND WHICH THE BANGLADEES SEEM TO FEAR THAT THE INDIANS WANT WOULD INVOLVE HIGH POLITICAL COSTS IN BANGLADESH, AND THUS FURTHER TRAIL PERIODS MAY BE REQUIRED. ADDING TO BANGALEE UNEASE IS THE VIEW THAT THE RECENT FLOODING IN BIHAR WILL GENERATE A CRY FOR FLOOD CONTROL DAMS FURTHER UP THE GANGETIC VALLEY WHICH WILL HAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FLOW AT FARAKKA WHICH CANNOT YET BE

ASSESSED, BUT WHICH PRECLUDE ANY HARD AND FAST DECISIONS ON FARAKKA FOR A WHILE.

7. ANTI-SMUGGLING COOPERATION. THIS WAS YET ANOTHER BANGLADESH-INDIAN ECONOMIC QUESTION WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE RESOLVED POLITICALLY. THE INDIANS AT THE MAY MEETING IN CALCUTTA BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE RESPECTIVE BORDER SECURITY ELEMENTS AND THE TWO MINISTRIES OF HOME AFFAIRS HAD ARGUED FOR CLOSER COOPERATION AND A GREATER EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS IN ORDER TO REDUCE SMUGGLING (SEE CALCUTTA 970 NOTAL). SMUGGLING REPRESENTED BOTH A LOSS OF CUSTOMS REVENUES AND REPRESENTED A FLOW OF RESOURCES OVER WHICH THE GOVERNMENTS LACK CONTROL, SEN SAID . HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT THIS ISSUE, TOGETHER FARAKKA AND THE BOUNDARY QUESTIONS WOULD BE TAKEN UP, QUOTE AMONG OTHER OUTSTANDING ISSUES END QUOTE, AT THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY, SPECIFICALLY, AT THE NEXT MINISTERIAL LEVEL MEETING.
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